A Short Method of Mental Prayer

by Father Niccolò Ridolfi, O.P.

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Introduction

Nicholas Ridolfi, the author of this *Treatise on Mental Prayer*, was born at Florence in 1578 of noble and indeed illustrious parents. When still quite young he was sent to the famous Roman College directed by Fathers of the Society of Jesus. Saint Philip Neri, the Apostle of Rome, became his spiritual director, and the holy old man was filled with delight when the boy told him that he wanted to be a Dominican. "If heaven had not reserved me for another work," he said, "I would willingly become a friar myself along with you." During the years which followed, the Saint did not cease to encourage Ridolfi to persevere in his holy vocation, even predicting that he would become General of the Order and have to undergo exceptionally severe trials. Saint Philip was on intimate and friendly terms with the Dominicans of the Minerva; consequently, it is hardly surprising to learn that, when at last the time came, the Prior of that convent invited him to bestow the habit himself on the youthful postulant. This touching ceremony took place about the year 1592.

After passing through his studies with distinction, and himself teaching theology at the Minerva, Nicholas Ridolfi was elected Provincial of the Roman Province in 1619. Three years later he became Master of the Sacred Palace, and in 1628, on the death of the Master General, he was appointed by Pope Urban VIII to be Vicar-General for the time being of the whole Order of Saint Dominic. At the Chapter in the following year he was elected in the first scrutiny to fill the vacant office of Master General, and immediately set about to do all that he could for the welfare of the Order thus entrusted to his care. His zeal for observance was truly admirable, and he strove to infuse everywhere regular life and religious fervour. He put a stop to abuses with

unflinching firmness, and of special interest to us is the fact that he took practical steps to promote the restoration of the English Province.

Such energy, however, as may well be imagined, did not long go unopposed. Among prelates in high places as well as among his own brethren, the zealous General encountered enemies. Intrigue followed upon intrigue, streams of accusations were made to appear to be pouring in from all sides, and at last, in April, 1644, by one of those dispositions of Providence which are so difficult for us to understand, the same Pope Urban who had hitherto thought so highly of the distinguished Dominican, peremptorily deposed him from his office without so much even as trying the case. Laden with odious charges, humiliated before all the world, prevented, moreover, from attempting to justify himself, Nicholas Ridolfi fulfilled perfectly the prediction of Saint Philip. It is true that he was soon offered a bishopric, but the ex-General begged to be excused on the ground that if he was unfit to rule the Order of Saint Dominic, much less was he worthy to wear a mitre. A few months passed, and another Pope, Innocent X, ascended the Throne of Saint Peter. The case of Ridolfi was at once investigated, with the result that the deposed Superior, completely exculpated, was restored to favour. Shortly afterwards, on the death of the General who had succeeded him, Ridolfi was appointed by the Pope President-General of the Order (a purposely unique title) until the next Chapter. He would then most certainly have been again unanimously elected by the Capitular Fathers, had not his death, which occurred on May 25, 1650 (the eve of the feast of Saint Philip Neri), released him from this vale of tears.

Such, briefly, was the career of Nicholas Ridolfi, as it appeared in the eyes of the world; but the reader will probably be more interested to learn that those with whom

the great Dominican was intimate regarded him as a holy religious whose entire life was consecrated to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This little treatise itself reveals to us something of the author's interior life; and, although there are already many books on Mental Prayer, we have not hesitated to add this one to the number, because real unction seems to flow from every page of it, filling souls with genuine fervour and making them eager to persevere in the practice of Mental Prayer, even when aridity and spiritual weariness take the place of the sweetness of sensible devotion. Though addressed in the first instance to Dominican Novices, it is perfectly applicable to all devout people, and for this reason we have not presumed to change its form. The translation has been made from the edition of Pée Meynard, O.P., of the Province of Lyons, and we have not omitted to make use of the explanatory notes of that master of the spiritual life. With him we may express the hope, nay, the conviction, that those who follow the simple directions of this little book will derive immense help and encouragement in the pursuit of the holy ways of Prayer.

- Father Raymund Devas, O.P.

Preface

Behold, my dearly beloved Sons, a Method of Mental Prayer, which I have put briefly, to make it easier; for you ought to practise this spiritual exercise with great fidelity every day of your lives.

Prayer, the plenteous and fruitful source of all virtues, will increase charity in your hearts; and this divine love will make you renounce generously all the pleasures of the senses and of the world, and face joyously labours, austerities and mortifications. Prayer will inspire you with the filial fear which you ought to have towards God and which always ensures the flight of sin. Indeed, Prayer ceaselessly reminds us of the presence of that Divine Lord in Whose sight the mountains are as wax in the rays of a summer sun, and before Whom the foundations of the earth tremble and the pillars of the firmament shake with awe. Prayer will make the bright light of the presence of God shine in your minds; it will carry you up to His very Throne, and make you understand that in God alone is true good to be found and possessed, and that God alone deserves to be the object of your desires. Lastly, the delights of Prayer will give to your wills a holy, firm and unshakable hope of attaining eternal happiness by the help of divine grace. You will even taste in anticipation the unspeakable delights which are reserved in heaven for God's faithful servants.

Apply yourselves, then, each day, with holy joy and great care, to Mental Prayer - according to the salutary advice of the Apostle who tells us that we should "pray without ceasing" and never give up.

Have continually before your eyes the example of our glorious Father Saint Dominic; both by day and by night he

devoted himself to this holy exercise and reaped from it that fervour of spirit with which he was animated in all his actions. Very often, as you know, in order to pray the more, he deprived himself of sleep, after the example of his Divine Master Who used to pass His nights in Prayer. Be imitators of him, as he was of Jesus Christ, and be like true children who do not want to degenerate from the holy practices of their Father.

Finally, in giving yourselves to the exercise of Prayer, do not forget to recommend to God the advancement of our holy Order and the salvation of my soul. May Our Lord for ever laden you with His blessings.

Your Servant in Jesus,
- Father Nicholas, General

The Chief Parts of Mental Prayer

We wish, with the help of grace, to suggest to souls a short and easy Method of Mental Prayer. There is no need for us to make use of many powerful arguments to induce and encourage them to practise so pious and holy an exercise, since a great number of treatises have already been published on this subject. Very worthy and learned authors, assisted by the light of Divine Wisdom, have successfully devoted themselves to making evident its necessity and importance, its fruits and advantages. The Venerable Father Louis of Grenada, in particular, has left us excellent books on this subject. Here, then, it will suffice to show the way of making Mental Prayer well, by explaining the Chief Parts of which it is composed.

Before entering upon the subject we deem it our duty to establish the fundamental principle that, to make Mental Prayer well, two things are especially required. The first is to excite in the heart a very lively desire to devote oneself seriously and fervently to Prayer. The more ardent is this desire, the greater diligence and necessary care will the soul display in this holy exercise; and the more faithful a soul is to the practice of praying well, the more fruit will it reap thereby, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. The second thing required is to make a firm and inviolable resolution never to give up Mental Prayer, but to make it each day in spite of dryness, barrenness, work or temptation. We ought to follow in this the example of Saint Theresa. That great Saint never ceased to make her Mental Prayer for eighteen years, although she derived from it no relish whatever, and was always subjected to numerous temptations. Wonderful constancy, worthy of our imitation!

But to come to the subject which we have to treat of here, Mental Prayer comprises three parts – namely, *the preparation*, *the body of the Prayer*, and *the conclusion*. This division into three parts is easily explained. Meditation is but another name for mental prayer, and is so used throughout this work, and meditation is, in fact, nothing else than the application of our mind to some subject of piety in order to excite in our will holy affections and firm resolutions, and by this means to make ourselves advance in the spiritual life. But since this consideration, accompanied by affections and resolutions, is a thing of very great importance, which, moreover, no one can make worthily without the assistance of the Holy Ghost, it is necessary that the subject of the meditation, as well as the person who is going to meditate, should be well prepared. *Preparation*, then, precedes *the body of the Prayer*, and *the conclusion* comes last, summing up the fruit of the Prayer so as to make it more profitable.

Preparation, the Body of the Prayer, and Conclusion: such are the divisions of Mental Prayer.

The Preparation contains three points:

1. The *Presence of God*, which consists of an act of lively faith by which we believe that God is present with us, especially in this exercise of Prayer.

2. *Profound humility*, which springs from a thorough knowledge of our own misery and incapacity, and which leads us to confess sincerely, from the bottom of our hearts, that we are unworthy to present ourselves before the Divine Majesty.

3. *A petition for help*, by which we implore the Divine assistance, the protection of the Blessed Virgin, and the help

of our Guardian Angel and of those Saints to whom we have a special devotion.

The Body of the Prayer, also, contains three points:

1. The *consideration*, which we make upon the subject of our meditation.

2. The *affections*, which incline our heart towards, or estrange it from, the subject of our meditation, according as it be beneficial or prejudicial to our perfection.

3. The *resolutions*, which consist in the firm purpose to practise the good we have perceived or felt, or to fly the evil we have detested.

The Conclusion, finally, contains three points:

1. The *petition for help*, to put our resolutions into practice, and to obtain the graces necessary for our own salvation and that of our neighbour, according as we are obliged to this by the laws of charity.

2. The *act of thanksgiving*, to return thanks to God Who has inspired us with good thoughts, holy affections and strong resolutions, and allowed us to treat familiarly with Him during our Prayer.

3. The *act of oblation*, by which, in union with the merits of Jesus Christ, of the Most Blessed Virgin and of the Saints, we offer to God for His glory our life, thoughts, affections and actions.

The Presence of God

“I set the Lord always in my sight, for He is at my right hand that I be not moved.” – *Psalm 15:8*

The first point in the preparation for Mental Prayer is the Presence of God. The more easily to put itself in this Divine Presence, the devout soul should reflect, first of all, upon the importance of what it is going to do in Prayer: it is going to treat with God concerning the things of its salvation, nay more, of the glory of the Divine Majesty; after the example of Moses who retired to the mountain to consult God touching the conduct of the people of Israel. The soul ought, then, to estrange itself carefully from the thought of things unconnected with the Prayer it intends to make. Imitate him who wishes to reflect deeply upon some pressing affair of great importance: he shuts himself up in his room, or in some remote part of the house, darkens the windows, and closes his eyes, so as not to think of anything else except this affair which concerns him so closely. Our Lord says it in the Gospel: “But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father.”

When the soul recollects itself in this manner and enters into itself, the understanding easily conceives a vivid and deep impression of the Presence of God everywhere. Thus, he who is in a church near the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, being supported by faith, firmly believes that Jesus Christ is there really present, that He sees him, knows him, and perceives all the secrets of his heart. Wherever the devout soul be, it can effectually convince itself that God is present, that He sees it and knows it, and that with His Divine Essence He penetrates to the very depths of its being and entirely fills it. This truth is incontestable. Indeed, if God was not present in

us, our soul could not subsist; its being would fall into an abyss of nothingness, if God did not preserve it and sustain it by His power; and as this act cannot be separated from Himself, God is really present wherever this act is.

The soul will then convince itself that it is not as intimately united to the body as God is to itself; that fire is not so really contained in red-hot iron as God is in the essence of the soul; that a fish in the sea is not so immersed in the water as the soul is in God, Whose Presence floods it as much interiorly as exteriorly; wherever it be, it will always find God present, for it carries Him in its heart.

The Different Ways of Putting Oneself in the Presence of God

“Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy Face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell. Thou art present.” – *Psalm 138:7,8*

The best way of putting oneself in the Presence of God is to fill oneself with thoughts of faith, to believe firmly that God is present in all things, and that Jesus Christ sees and knows all our thoughts. In acting thus, it will not be necessary for one to make a great effort of the imagination to picture Our Lord in the form and figure He had when He conversed among men; this would cause fatigue and render us unable to pursue our Prayer.* Let the soul then recollect itself, and by an act of lively faith behold God present within it; after which it will easily conceive, by means of another act of faith, the Immensity of God, His sovereign Goodness which communicates itself so liberally to creatures, His infinite Majesty which overspreads the whole universe and before which every created thing appears as a mere nothing.

To facilitate the practice of this act of the Presence of God, we will indicate different ways of making it.

The first way of putting oneself in the Presence of God is to recollect what is taught us by theologians. God unites Himself to all beings by His Power, His Presence and His Essence: by His Power, because He controls and governs all creatures from the first of the Seraphim to the last little worm, and subjects them to His Sovereign Dominion, as a powerful monarch who makes known his authority in the most distant parts of his kingdom, sending delegates everywhere to administer justice; by His Presence, for all things are uncovered before His eyes, just as a king seated on his throne sees the courtiers who are before him; by His Essence, because, being infinite, He is present everywhere, so that the soul finds Him in all the members and in every part of its body.

The second way is to consider the absolute Being of God, on Which in all things all creatures depend, in such sort that without Him no creature could subsist and no man have any good either in the order of nature or in the order of grace, but would fall into a thousand disorders and evils and even into nothingness.

The third way is to consider the Divine Word united to the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ and to the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. This point is contained in the advice given by Saint Theresa in an apparition to one of her religious: “We who are in heaven,” she said, “and you who are on earth, should make but one by love and purity; we in heaven by contemplating the Divine Essence, you on earth by adoring the Most Blessed Sacrament, towards Which you ought to behave during your exile as we do here towards the Divine Essence – we in enjoyment, you in suffering.” This

way of establishing the Presence of God can easily be practised when one makes the Prayer in church.

The fourth way is to occupy the mind with some mystery concerning Our Lord Jesus Christ, by representing Him as passing before our eyes, and by attentively fixing the eyes of the soul upon His Sacred Person.

The fifth way is to picture Jesus Christ present in all our actions, as a faithful friend whom we consult in all our affairs.

The sixth way is to consider that God resides specially in our heart as in His Temple, or even, as Spouse, in His nuptial bed. J esus Christ Himself suggests to us this thought when, speaking of Saint Gertrude, He says that those who wish to find Him should seek for Him in the heart of this virgin His spouse.

The seventh and last way of being in the Presence of God, the highest and most divine of all, consists in the union of our soul with God brought about by charity, when the soul, touched by the most active and ardent flames of God's love, is transformed into Him to such an extent that it can speak of nothing else but Him, think of nothing else but Him, and of what concerns His glory, admiring His infinite perfections, and raising itself up by vehement desires to that degree of union with God in which the soul has with Him but one and the same heart, but one and the same spirit, and but one and the same will: *Unum cor, unus spiritus, et una voluntas*.

An Example of Putting Oneself in the Presence of God

"The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men and the bottom of the deep." – *Sirach 23:28*

My Lord and my God Whose infinite Majesty is incomprehensible, I confess that the hindrances and useless occupations of this miserable life make me often forget Thee, albeit Thou art my sovereign good. I live, O my Divine Master, without any recollection, with an absent, vagrant and troubled mind and with a heart set upon the foulness of earth, without thinking of Thee, although Thou for Thy part dost not lose sight of me.

What amazing blindness of heart! Thou seest me without ceasing, and I, nevertheless, do not see Thee; Thou art continually and most intimately present with me, and I – I feel myself to be very far from Thee; Thou residest in my heart, dwelling there by Thy Essence, and I, following the evil inclination of my wild thoughts, am ever flying far from Thee; and whereas the eyes of Thy loving Providence cast their sweet looks upon my soul, my soul, miserable as it is, fixes its regards upon the foolish vanities of creatures, without reflecting on the happiness of enjoying Thy Presence.

Behold me then, most loving Lord; I come into Thy Presence, although most unworthy, with humility and confidence, in order to treat with Thee during the time of this Prayer concerning the means which I ought to take to become truly obedient. My adorable Master, for mercy’s sake turn not Thy looks away from me, but by an excess of Thy infinite Goodness do me the favour of giving me audience during this Prayer. Feelings of lively faith now fill me with Thy Divine Presence, owing to the Immensity of Thy Being, and also to the operation of Thy Divinity, for indeed without Thee my understanding would never have conceived this intimate thought of Thy adorable Presence, nor my will have ever relished it. Since it is Thou Who dost thus call me to Thyself, and Who dost thus sweetly rouse me, I come to Thee, my Lord, to hear Thy voice. My eyes are fixed on Thee, as the

eyes of a slave upon those of his master, as the eyes of a little babe on the breast of its mother where it is nourished and where it rests. Most loving Lord, I wish carefully to study Thy divine Countenance, on which depends all my good, and from which I derive life and the understanding to know Thee.

The Act of Humility

“I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes.” – *Genesis 18:27*

The act of Humility is the second point in the *preparation* for Mental Prayer. It is very certain that those who consider attentively the grandeur, the majesty, and the supreme eminence of God, ought necessarily to recognise their own vileness and to acknowledge their unworthiness to appear in the Divine Presence. Nevertheless, because God is the sovereign goodness and an ocean of infinite perfections upon which our whole good depends, we can take the liberty of presenting ourselves before Him, in spite of our base-ness, in spite of our nothingness and of our ordinary faults, in spite even of the most enormous sins which make us rather subjects for His rigorous justice than objects of His compassionate mercy. This is why, in profoundly adoring His supreme grandeur, we should humble ourselves in the depths of our misery, earnestly beseeching God to deign to hear us in His mercy, although we be but so much dust and ashes, poor worms of the earth, the height of imperfection, and the slaves of many vices; and although we have trod His divine inspirations under foot, and carried our effrontery to revolting against His dread Majesty.

We can prostrate and humble ourselves in the Presence of God in different ways:

First of all, as rebellious vassals who have taken up arms against their lawful Prince, and who, at this moment, counting on His mercy, come humbly to demand pardon, and with His pardon hope to receive of His divine liberality.

Secondly, as the miserably poor who exhibit to the rich and the compassionate their sores, their ulcers and their extreme want, in order to receive some help.

Thirdly, as subjects who present petitions and requests to their Sovereign, in order to obtain some gift or the fulfilment of their desires.

Fourthly, as prodigal children who return to their Father's house with fear and confusion; or even as children high-born and virtuous who approach their Father respectfully to treat with Him of family affairs.

The act of Humility which we make in the Presence of God should not go all alone: it should be accompanied with great confidence in the Divine Goodness which, in spite of our baseness, incapacity, and unworthiness, allows us to present ourselves before Him, nay, even draws us thither and makes our wants known to us in order that we may represent them to Him, and that He may thus succour and assist us with His grace to relieve our miseries.

An Example of the Act of Humility

"He looketh upon the earth and maketh it tremble; He toucheth the mountains and they smoke." – *Psalm 103:32*

O Ineffable Goodness! O most merciful Father! O God Whose mercy is eternal! The angels in paradise and the holiest of men tremble in Thy Presence; the columns of heaven shake before Thee; the leading Seraphim beat their wings incessantly at the appearance of Thy dread Majesty, and the foundations of the earth tremble before the awe-inspiring glance of Thy eyes; and yet Thou allowest me, who am but dirt and corruption, to approach Thy Throne, to contemplate Thee, to speak to Thee, to deal with Thee familiarly as a friend with a friend.

Alas! What can I do, what should I do, but admire Thy sovereign grandeur, throw myself at Thy feet with a humble and contrite heart, and boldly avow that I am still only too content to remain prostrate before Thee with fear and confusion, since, being a mass of misery, darkness and sin, I deserve to be eternally banished from the sight of Thy fatherly goodness, and be dismissed with the damned rather than be allowed to appear before Thy Divine Majesty. Nevertheless, as Thou art truly a God full of goodness and mercy, Who wiliest not the death of a sinner, I address myself to Thee to know Thy adorable will, and to consider the strict obligation I am under to acquit myself perfectly of holy obedience.

The Petition for Help

“The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon Him; to all that call upon Him in truth.” – *Psalm 144:18*

The third point in the preparation is the Petition for Help. Indeed, the soul which knows its own baseness and its inability to do good, which feels, moreover, that it depends absolutely on God, will be easily drawn to demand His grace and the help necessary to make the Prayer as it should be made, and with profit.

The Petition for Help can be made in several ways:

The first is to have recourse to God by invoking the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity: the Father, to Whom Power is attributed, in order that He may assist us against the distractions which, through our weakness and misery, too often come to us during Prayer; the Son, Who is the uncreated Wisdom of the Father, in order that He may dispel the darkness of our understanding and fill it with the light and thought of His ineffable Wisdom; the Holy Ghost, Whose infinite Goodness can communicate to us heavenly favours, in order that He may disclose to us the motives which will lead us sweetly and efficaciously to do good and to walk in the way of perfection.

The second way is to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. As treasurer of the riches of heaven she can help us in a thousand ways during our Prayer.

The third way is to address ourselves to our Angel Guardian, in order that he may protect us against the attacks of the devil. The latter, indeed, envious of our spiritual advancement, does whatever he possibly can to trouble us

during our Prayer, and to interrupt this holy exercise. It is the more necessary to have recourse to our Angel Guardian seeing that this prince of the heavenly court serves as a mediator between God and our soul, bearing to God our holy desires, and bringing back to us divine illumination.

The fourth way is to make use of ejaculatory prayer; for example: My God, enlighten my darkness – *Deus mens illumina tenebras meas*; Turn not Thy Face from Thy servant – *Ne avertas faciem tuam a puero two*; Teach me goodness and discipline – *Bonitatem et discipiinam . . . doce me*; Give to me understanding, and I will study Thy law, and I will guard it with all my heart – *Da mihi intellectum, et scrutabor legem tuam, et custodiam illam in toto corde meo*.

An Example of the Petition for Help

“Come, Holy Ghost, send down Thy beams
Which sweetly flow in silent streams
From Thy bright throne above.”

O Divine Paraclete, I know that my understanding is filled with darkness and ignorance, and that I am entirely incapable of performing the holy exercise of Prayer. This is why I have recourse to Thee and why I implore Thy Divine Goodness. For mercy’s sake send forth a ray of Thy light and dispel the darkness of my ignorance. Purify my heart, I pray Thee, that it may be a vessel pure enough to receive the precious balm of Thy grace. Come, Eternal Love, inflame my heart with holy zeal for Thy service. And Thou, Who art a Father full of pity for the poor, come and distribute the heavenly bread of Thy divine instructions to the hungry soul of Thy poor mendicant. I am Thy son, though most unworthy, and Thou art my Father; do not then refuse me, I beseech Thee, but open to me the treasure of Thy blessings;

and without regarding my unworthiness, come to help me of my poverty with the abundance of Thy graces.

And Thou, my most sweet Jesus, instill into my heart the virtue and the efficaciousness of Thy love, but in such fashion that I may not close this Prayer without being altogether changed and transformed. To this end I repeat my petition, and beg of Thee in the name of Thy most holy Mother, the fountain of grace and mercy, to grant me a real conversion and a total change of life.

O holy Angel Guardian, this is the moment to let me feel the loving effects of thy charitable ministry, and to protect me against the snares of the devil. And thou, O my most glorious Father, Saint Dominic, whose Prayer was so fervent and continual, do not forsake me, but let me receive the double spirit of love with which thou wast ever inflamed – *Ut fiat in me duplex spiritus tuus*.

The Consideration

“Open Thou my eyes, and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law.” – *Psalm 118:18*

We have divided the second part of Mental Prayer into three points: the consideration, the affections, and the resolutions. Let us speak first of all about the Consideration. This is nothing else than an operation of the understanding on the subject which we have chosen, or which has been given us for meditation, looking into it and examining all the motives capable of inciting us to the practice of virtue.

There are three ways of making the Consideration:

The first studies the reasons which can incline the will to some good movement. For example, those who wish to have a great love of chastity will consider the motives capable of inciting us to practise this virtue – namely, that God holds it in such great esteem that He willed to be born of a Virgin; that virgins are His beloved spouses; that virginity is crowned in heaven with a special aureola; and that chastity makes us like unto the Angels.

The second way is to devote oneself to the consideration of all the circumstances of a mystery. For example, if we are meditating on the Poverty of Jesus Christ at His birth, we shall rest our thoughts on the miserable stable in which He chose to come into the world; after that we shall consider the circumstance of the country, far away from His Mother’s ordinary home, where she could have more easily obtained the necessary things which were wanting at Bethlehem; then, the poverty of the swaddling-clothes in which His sacred members were wrapped; and, finally, our Divine

Saviour’s being born in the presence of two stupid, clumsy animals, and His being visited by poor shepherds.

The third way takes a different line; it steadily considers one object alone, weighs it and examines it at length, until the heart feels keenly moved by it. For example, he who would meditate on eternity will give all his attention to this reflection; time flies with rapidity; accumulated millions and millions of years have always an end, whereas eternity has not, for it exceeds all time; it is a measure which has no limit, a number which has no end; and just as God, by reason of His Eternity, can never cease to exist, so eternity itself can never finish. O Eternity, how long thou art! O eternal pains, how endless! Pleasure only lasts a moment, says Saint Augustine, pain for ever: *Momentaneum quod delectat, ceterum quod crucial.*

It must be noticed here that the operations of the understanding ought always to lead to affections of the will, whether we are trying to reason on some special subject, or are examining the circumstances of a mystery, or are attentively reflecting upon one single truth. This is why we ought only to apply ourselves to the Consideration in so far as necessary to understand well the truth on which we are meditating; for as soon as the feeling of devotion enters into our heart, we must stop the activity of the mind and allow the will to rouse and stimulate this good impulse more and more. Otherwise, if we spend the whole time of Mental Prayer in making the Consideration, it will be a study, properly so called, rather than a meditation.

For the same reason we must avoid in our Consideration all dry and barren thoughts, such as the subtleties of philosophy, moral applications beside the point, theological speculations and all that serves only to distract the mind and give satisfaction to our understanding. The

Consideration, then, which we must make, should be devout and holy, and calculated to touch the heart.* Whence it follows that if the soul does not find its will moved by one consideration, it should pass on to another which will encourage and enkindle it more, stopping at the moment that the heart is really animated and strengthened. So much so, that if in the beginning of the Meditation, the Holy Spirit fills its heart, it should in that case stop the Consideration, and enjoy the sweetness which the Divine Paraclete allows it to taste; but after these moments of fervour have passed, it must return again to the Consideration, according to the length of time which can be devoted to the Prayer.

An Example of the Consideration

"In the morning I will stand before Thee and will see, because Thou art not a God that wiliest iniquity." – *Psalm 5:5*

My Lord, I realise that I shall never please Thy Divine Majesty unless I am truly obedient. Arouse thyself, then, 0 my soul, and consider all the creatures of the universe, and reflect upon the splendid example which they give thee by their obedience – with promptitude and punctuality, all follow the orders and the ways which God has prescribed for them. The sun rises every morning because its Creator has thus ordained; it sets every evening because such is the good pleasure of God. If the sun was at liberty to have its own way, doubtless it would never send forth a single ray upon us; but because God has commanded this, it gives its light without distinction to the just and to sinners.

Learn, then, my soul, from a creature which is not gifted with reason, how thou oughtest to obey. Admire the stars, consider the times and the seasons of the year which follow one another in conformity to the orders of God. Look at the animals which obey their masters. Examine carefully the

plants, the stones, the earth and all the elements, and be ashamed before their obedience. But, above all, rest thy thoughts specially upon the first and most excellent model of all perfection, upon Jesus Christ, Who, being God, submitted Himself for love of us to men and to the law; and Who, to honour obedience, willed to sacrifice His life on the infamous wood of the Cross. “He became obedient unto death,” says Saint Paul, “even unto the death of the Cross”.

The Acts of Affection

“I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord…is my refuge…my God.” – *Psalm 17:1,2*

After the Consideration one must turn to the Affections. The property of the understanding is to enlighten the will and to make known to it the good which it should love and do, and the evil which it should hate and avoid. As soon as this operation of the understanding is achieved, the will ought to perform its operation, stirring itself up to the love of the good which it has learned, and to a horror of the evil which it has seen: in Mental Prayer, then, the Acts of Affection which follow the Consideration have no other object than to touch the will.

Divine charity is the end of Meditation, giving it its truly supernatural character and rendering it holy and sanctifying; meditation without devout Acts of Affection is barren and without merit . All the fruit of the Prayer, then, depends upon the acts of the will. This is why we should labour as much as we possibly can to derive holy Affections and efficacious desires from all our Considerations.

See, then, how one should seek to produce these Acts of Affection. If the subject matter concerns what is good, we should stir ourselves up to love it – for example, if we are meditating on paradise, our will should set itself to desire it. If the subject matter concerns what is bad, and what can cause us evil, our will should apply itself to take the means to flee from it and avoid it – for example, when we meditate on hell, we should picture it to ourselves as so terrible that every effort ought to be made not to merit it. If we take for the subject of our meditation some virtue, we should consider its advantages in order to stimulate ourselves to

acquire it. If, on the contrary, we represent to ourselves the sad results of some vice, we should form such an idea of it as would fill us with horror at it and make us avoid it in all our actions.

We can derive from the same subject many different movements of the will. For example, if the soul wishes to reflect upon Our Most Sweet Jesus dying on the Cross for us, it can give way to different Affections: such as love, in order to return love for love; or fear, for if the Innocent One is treated with so much severity, how will a soul, that is guilty and laden with sins, be able to escape the hands of Divine Justice? or hope, believing most firmly that God will deal favourably with it, and that He will not refuse the help necessary to save it, since He so lovingly sacrifices His Precious Blood and even His Life for it upon the Cross; or sorrow for sins, seeing that they have been the cause of the sufferings and cruel death of Jesus Christ; or spiritual joy, the salvation of the world being the happy result of the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Sometimes, we may derive but one Affection from our Consideration. For example, when we meditate upon the excellence of chastity, we excite ourselves to love it and to take the means to practise it and to acquire it in a perfect degree with regard to both the body and soul. This Act of Affection ought always to be accompanied by serious self-reflection, our personal dispositions being considered with regard to the subject upon which we are meditating, so that we may see whether we have the virtue which the Consideration makes us love and desire, whether we are exempt from the vice of which we have just seen the hideousness and evil. To this reflection it is necessary to add another to see whether we are making progress in the virtue on which we are meditating, whether we are really detached from the vice which we detest, whether there remain in us

some repugnance to perfection, whether there be not some evil vestige of our bad habits – in a word, we have to see whether we are advancing, or whether we are going back in the practice of this virtue. And because this reflection is of great help to us, in the way of perfection, it is often necessary in this part of the Prayer to represent to ourselves some virtue, now one, now another, according as the Holy Spirit suggests, in conformity with the subject of our meditation, and to see whether we have this virtue in deed rather than in word, or with what earnestness we are striving to acquire it.

Again, we can put before our eyes some imperfection which is detrimental to us, seeing how far we grovel under its tyranny through our own fault, or the little care we take to destroy it; how easily and how often we give way to it, and the negligence we have shown in avoiding it.

An Example of the Acts of Affection

"I am become as a beast before Thee, and I am always with Thee." – *Psalm 72:23*

What shall I say of myself, my Lord and my God, if not this – that, although of the number of Thy rational creatures, I see myself to be through my own fault in a state far lower than that of the beasts and insensible creatures! What confusion for me, to behold myself so reduced that such a lesson can effectively be given me! Nevertheless, my God, it is so, since a beast allows itself to be led by its master wherever he wills, whereas I, miserable that I am, am unwilling to obey Thy commandments. Henceforth, then, I no longer wish to follow either the inclination of my senses, or the reasoning of my own judgment, but I wish to allow myself to be guided entirely by Thee, so that I may say with the royal Prophet: "I

am become as a beast before Thee: and I am always with Thee."

If the sun, the heavens, the stars, and all the elements execute Thy orders with such exactitude, is it not most reasonable, O my God, that I should entirely abandon my will in order to accomplish Thy adorable will, out of regard for the love which I owe Thee? What would become of the universe if creatures were left to themselves? Everything would return to its first chaos, and there would be nothing but horrible and frightful confusion.

How often am I a burden to the holy Order to which Thy divine grace has called me, in not being willing to submit my judgment and my will to the judgment and commands of my Superiors, who hold here the place of Thy adorable Majesty and give me orders in Thy Name!

Do not deceive thyself, O my soul, but examine thyself seriously and see the number of years thou hast spent in doing thy own will without following blindly that of thy Superiors, avoiding the obedience which thou hast vowed so definitely. How many times has obedience spoken, and thou hast resisted! Blush, then, with shame and confusion, since thy conscience finds thee guilty on this point.

Consider the most perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, and thou wilt have good reason to cry out with confusion: O wretched creature, outcast of the earth, arrogant and proud soul, how darest thou follow thy own judgment and thy own will? God was willing to obey a man, and thou, wretch that thou art, art not willing to obey God Who speaks to thee by a man. Jesus Christ died on the Cross out of obedience, and thou, ill-advised as thou art, art not willing to do anything else in religious life except thy own will. Unhappy creature, wilt thou always be subject to this misery?

The Resolutions

“I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice.” – *Psalm 118:106*

After the Considerations and Acts of Affection come the Resolutions. Indeed, it would be of little use to conceive holy desires, or to have inclinations to do good in the Prayer, if we did not make good and strong Resolutions to put them into practice, each one in particular.

To accomplish this essential point of the Prayer well, we must bear in mind the following advice.

1. Whatever happens, we should never omit to make Resolutions, even when we are in the midst of interior troubles. This piece of advice is the most important of all, and we must never dispense ourselves from putting it into practice. If we are arid and dry in the considerations of the understanding, or indifferent and cold in the affections of the will, we must not for that reason give up making good Resolutions.

2. If, through being too long over the considerations or the affections, we find ourselves at the end of the Prayer without having formed any good Resolution, we must not, therefore, dispense ourselves with regard to this important point; we should keep alive within ourselves the good feelings which were filling us, and at the first opportunity during the day we should retire apart and endeavour to make a Resolution in conformity with the subject of our meditation.

3. We should make our Resolutions with a great mistrust of ourselves, because it is easy to promise and very difficult to fulfill. If it happens during the day that through our frailty

we are led to break our Resolutions, we should not lose courage nor give way to pusillanimity; we should renew our good purpose and acknowledge sincerely before God with true humility that without the help of efficacious grace we can do no good whatever.

4. In our Resolutions we should always keep to some special fault which it behooves us to correct. For example, if we experience in our actions feelings of vainglory, if self-complaisance swells our heart when we are praised, if we have an extraordinary inclination to praise ourselves, it is in this line that we must direct our Resolutions, promising God that no word shall ever escape our lips which can redound to our own praise, and that instead of extolling ourselves we will rather publish our faults and be glad to let others know them. Or if, again, in the Prayer we are stirred up to observe our rules carefully and exactly, we ought to direct our good purpose on this head and make the firm Resolution to keep them in all the circumstances under which we are exposed to breaking them – for example, to keep the silence in such a place or at such a time, or with regard to such a person, and never to speak without permission.

5. The more surely to strengthen our particular Resolutions, we should make one more general Resolution to cover them – for example, if we have resolved not to praise ourselves, and never to submit to any praise, or again, to observe the silence, we should do violence to ourselves never to say a single word which is superfluous or without motive, even when we are speaking with permission.

6. We must not fall into the snare of wishing to do things which are imaginary or fanciful – for example, it would not be to the point for a novice to make a Resolution to go to the Indies, nor for a simple religious to promise God to be

fervent and zealous as a prelate. Our Resolutions ought to be conformed to our own special vocation.

7. The object of our Resolutions should always be the Glory of God, the edification of our neighbour, our own spiritual advancement, and the perfect fulfillment of our duty – for example, to apply ourselves to the exercise of the presence of God, to mortify ourselves in such or such things, to devote ourselves to the practice of such or such a virtue, to fulfill well the duties of our office, to perform even the smallest observances of the Order and the smallest practices of perfection.

8. During the day we should recall the Resolutions of our Prayer, even renewing them at our chief spiritual exercises, such as Holy Mass, Holy Communion, the midday examination of conscience, and such like times, according to the suggestions which the Holy Ghost will give us.

An Example of the Resolution

“Make the way known to me wherein I should walk, for I have lifted up my soul to Thee.” – *Psalm 142:8*

O my God, I have decided at last to make a good and firm Resolution. I wish henceforth to submit to holy obedience. I am firmly resolved never to refuse to obey the will of my Superiors and the prescriptions of my Rule. But this is not enough. I intend, with the help of Thy grace, to obey with promptitude, humility, and perseverance. I wish always to submit myself to obedience in conformity with the intentions of my Superiors, in order to make it more perfect. And although I am often so miserable as to experience repugnance, chagrin, and pain in the practice of it, and although even at present I realise that my judgment has not all the requisite submission, nevertheless, in spite of all

these obstacles of my perverse nature, I wish punctually to execute what has been ordered me, believing and judging that my Superior has the right and reason so to act, and that it will be very good if he continues to treat me in this way. I realise that it is only pride which separates subjects from Superiors, in their judgment or by their will or act. In order to humble my proud nature, as soon as I discover the intentions of my Superiors, I will not wait to be commanded, but I will forestall their orders, so as to make myself more perfect in the practice of obedience.

I know very well, O my God, that I am full of private judgment and self will; but, my infinitely good Lord, separate me from these faults by Thy Mercy. “Teach me to do Thy Will, because Thou art my God” Whom I ought to obey perfectly.

The Conclusion

We have divided Mental Prayer into three parts, namely: the preparation, the body of the Prayer, and the conclusion. The Conclusion embraces the Petition for Help, the Act of Thanksgiving, and the Act of Oblation.

The Petition for Help

“Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.” – *Matthew 7:7*

Our resolutions could never be put into practice without the assistance of the grace of God, by reason above all of our own extreme weakness. It is necessary that we should have recourse to God, Who will give us strength to *do well* after having given us the strength to *wish* to correct ourselves.

We should present out Petition to God in the same way as was explained with regard to the third point of the preparation. We should, as far as possible, stir up our confidence, praying the Eternal Father that, in the Name of Jesus Christ His Son, He will be good enough to grant us what we desire with so much ardour and affection, and that He will fulfill in us the infallible words of Jesus Christ, Who said: “If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you” (John 16:23). Then, addressing Jesus Christ, we should beg of Him with importunity the grace wholly to accomplish what we have resolved upon in the Prayer, through the merits of His holy Mother and of His faithful servant, Saint Dominic; and also with the help of our holy Guardian Angel whom we may invoke to come to our assistance to remind us at opportune moments of our resolutions. We must then arm ourselves with courage, hoping firmly that we shall be heard. This confidence will fill

our heart with joy, and make us carry out with greater promptitude and more fervour our holy resolutions.

We will not give an example of the Petition for Help, but each one will be able to make it following the directions we have given.

The Act of Thanksgiving

“Giving thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the Saints.” – *Colossian 1:12*

The Act of Thanksgiving is very easy. There is nothing else to be done than to bless and thank God and the Saints who have aided us during the Prayer according as we asked them at the beginning. We should represent God to ourselves as accompanied by the whole heavenly court; we should humble ourselves before the Divine Majesty, adoring, blessing, and thanking Him from the bottom of our heart; or, in form of colloquy, saying to Him: My God, I glorify Thy infinite Goodness for ever, Thou Who hast deigned to communicate with my soul in this Prayer, making me share in divine graces, heavenly lights, and loving caresses. I bless Thee and thank Thee again, that, having admitted me among the number ol Thy little servants, Thou hast made me sit at the table of Thy dear children, and given me the Bread of Angels. I also thank Thy holy Mother, and all my patron Saints who have helped me to receive from Thy generous Hands this signal blessing of having been able to make my Prayer.

The Act of Oblation

“Bring to the Lord, O ye children of God…bring to the Lord glory and honour…adore ye the Lord in his holy court.” – *Psalm 28:1-2*

We must, in the last place, offer to God all the good which, with the help of His holy grace, we have done in our Prayer; we ought at the same time humbly to demand His pardon for all the negligences which we have com- mitted, and also for the slothfulness which we have displayed therein and which might have caused the withdrawal of graces that His Divine Heart had destined for us. Further, we must offer to God our soul, our body, our thoughts, our desires, our affections, our words and our actions, in order that all that is in us may be perfectly and totally directed to the glory of His Divine Majesty.

But as all this which belongs to us is very little in the sight of God, we should present to Him the merits of His dearly-beloved Son, the graces, mercies, privileges of His most holy Mother, the works and services of all the Saints, recommending to Him also all the duties with which we are charged, and especially Holy Church, the Sovereign Pontiff, Christian Princes, our holy Order, superiors and subjects, our parents and friends, the souls in Purgatory, and all those for whom we have promised to pray.

Final Conclusion and Useful Advice

For the Final Conclusion, we should bow down before God from the inmost depths of the heart, demanding with great humility His holy benediction. We should then retire within ourselves and recall the thoughts, desires, and feelings, which most deeply moved us, as well as all the graces which we received in the Prayer; and we should make of them a *spiritual bouquet*, the sweet fragrance of which, for our sanctification, we can inhale for the rest of the day. We should especially often recall our good resolutions, in order to practise them and to avoid appearing before God as untruthful, and that He may not reproach us, to our great

confusion, with having made fine promises and failed to keep a single one of them.

To finish with, we shall give some advice.

1. If there be souls extraordinarily favoured by God, who, without effort of mind, without trouble or work or any special direction, find themselves at once touched by the Holy Spirit, make their Mental Prayer fruitfully, with liberty of heart, according as God enlightens and guides them, without troubling about these ordinary practices, then there is no need for them to stop at the injunctions which we have given. Nevertheless, as this extraordinary gift of Prayer is rare, being met with only in very few persons; and as, further, those who pretend to have acquired it or would like to aspire to it, may be accused of presumption and pride, we beg all devout souls, speaking generally, who practise Mental Prayer, to follow the instructions which we have given, in order that they may advance with more humility and more security in the way of perfection.

2. Great care is necessary to see that there is fervour in all the parts of our meditation, from start to finish, so that it may be much more profitable. Especially is this so with regard to the Consideration; as we have already said, thoughts and subjects should be chosen which are calculated to move us more deeply. By this means we shall fix our attention the more firmly, and reap incomparably greater fruit from the Prayer.

3. With regard to the method of putting ourselves in the Presence of God – say, attentively weighing each word: “Behold me now before my God,” or, “God sees me, is now looking at me.” If these words, albeit said with serious reflection, do not produce in our understanding the same effect as these put in the form of colloquy: “O Sovereign

God, Whose Majesty is incomprehensible, I firmly believe that Thy Divine Looks penetrate to the very bottom of my heart, and that they never cease to regard Thy poor and miserable creature, often as it is that I do not think of Thee," then this second formula should be used and the first abandoned. But if the particular disposition we are in makes the first method of putting ourselves in the Presence of God more satisfactory, we ought to employ it and not the second. Similarly, with regard to the Consideration; if we find ourselves more moved by saying: "My Lord, how exceeding great did Thy Obedience appear when Thou didst deign to submit to death and to the death of the Cross," we ought to use this means of fixing our thoughts, rather than saying simply: "Jesus Christ is made obedient unto death." Finally, if in the Resolutions, it is more to our taste to say: "My Lord, for love of Thee, I wish to obey, and I promise Thee to do so with my whole heart," we ought to phrase it in that way, and not simply: "Henceforth, I must obey." If we cannot from the beginning make our Prayer in this affectionate manner, we should, at least, forcibly apply ourselves to it in certain acts which belong to it more especially, as in the Affections, Resolutions, Petition for Help, and in the Acts of Thanksgiving and Oblation, in order that our Prayers may not be deprived of their most essential quality, which is that of being a continual colloquy between the soul and God, an efficacious and fervent petition to the Divine Majesty for all that pertains to His glory and our salvation.

4. We will give another piece of advice to all who devote themselves to Prayer. It is to offer to the Eternal Father, towards the end of this holy exercise, the Humanity of our Saviour Jesus Christ streaming with blood, saying three *Paters* and *Aves* in memory of the three hours during which He suffered in most bitter agony on the Cross, and in honour of the cruel torments He suffered in His Passion until His last breath, in order to obtain from God, through the merits of

the Cross and Passion, all the graces we have asked for during our meditation. This offering will always be most acceptable to God, and most efficacious for obtaining precious heavenly gifts, and in particular the grace of suffering and dying in union with His Passion and Death. This is why we ought to pause chiefly on the most acute and painful sufferings which Jesus Christ endured for us during those three hours; it was then that Divine Justice obtained all that it could demand to be fully satisfied, receiving as the price of our Redemption the union of those prodigiously cruel interior and exterior torments, which made the Evangelists say that it was an excess of grief and of love.

Exercises for the Practice of the Presence of God for Every Day of the Week, According to the Seven Petitions of the Our Father

Sunday

“Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy Name.”

The Presence of God

On this day I will force myself to think of God present within my heart as my Father. I will behave myself before Him with the respect of a child to whom the inheritance of heaven has been promised, since God has created me to His own Image, and capable of knowing, loving and possessing Him. Furthermore, to correspond with this grace, I will procure the honouring of my Heavenly Father, hallowing Him in myself by holy thoughts and affections, and hallowing Him in my neighbour by edifying words and works.

Union with Jesus Christ

It is said that doves ordinarily withdraw to their dove-cot about the middle of the day; so should my soul today seek its retreat in the Wound in the side of Jesus Christ, close to His Divine Heart, in order to consider the excess of His love in my regard, and to receive from it some flames, begging Him that He would hold me hidden in His Heart, and come also into mine, and that no self-love, solicitude, hindrance, or anything else, deprive me of the honour of His dwelling within me, that, on the contrary, my heart may always be open to Him, as He Himself has always His Side open that I

may enter in when I like, and rest there most intimately with His loving Heart.

Virtue to Practice

Since the devil, in order to destroy the hallowing of the Most Holy Name of God, introduced into the world the sin of gluttony, and since also we see Christians, instead of hallowing His Divine Name on this day, abandoning themselves to many excesses against temperance and soberness, thus sullying the temple of their soul, I will force myself in conformity with my sublime dignity as a child of God to hold in horror all that injures Christian temperance, and I will be modest, restrained, sober, and well regulated at meals.

Monday

“Thy Kingdom come.”

Presence of God

On this day I will think of God present as my King. I will hold myself before His Divine Majesty in the posture of a very humble subject, begging Him to be good enough to establish His Kingdom in me, to take my soul as part of His Empire, to deliver it from all thoughts and affections contrary to His Divine Will, and to fill my heart with a fervent desire to extend His interior kingdom in souls and His exterior kingdom in Holy Church.

Union with Jesus Christ

While contemplating the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ, I will not forget the shameful diadem with which He was crowned in Pilate’s house. At the thought of this, I will hide myself among the thorns in My Saviour’s Crown like a

hunted hare, trembling and fugitive; and I will reflect upon how Jesus my Saviour willed to take complaisance and satisfaction in this ignominy. I will beg Him to forgive all my bad thoughts and ill-regulated affections – real spiritual thorns which so many times have pierced His Divine Heart more deeply than the material thorns buried themselves in His Sacred Head.

Virtue to Practice

Since the kingdom of God can only be won by fighting for it, I will take the resolution to fly sloth, to tread under foot all worldly thoughts, and make war upon my sluggishness and tepidity. I will work at my salvation courageously and ardently sustained by the hope of a blessed eternity.

Tuesday

“Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The Presence of God

Oh this day I will occupy myself with the thought of God present as my Heavenly Spouse. My soul belongs to God by faith and charity. I will ardently long to be united to Him more and more, to have but one and the same heart with Him, always to fulfil without reasoning about it His holy, agreeable, and perfect Will, spending my whole life without offending Him, and ceaselessly acquiring new virtues by a burning love of His Divine Goodness.

Union with Jesus Christ

I will unite myself generously with Jesus Christ laden with His Cross. Accompanying Him on the road to Calvary, I will hide myself in the terrible, deep wounds which the Cross made in His shoulders, so cruelly scourged as they already

were with the lashes that all the wounds thus received made but one. I will admire His fortitude and constancy in carrying the Cross, and the greatness of His patience in bearing that heavy burden for my sins which, to Him, were incomparably more unbearable than His excessive bodily pains.

Virtue to Practice

Since sin against the virtue of purity is that which is most contrary to the union of the soul with God, I will guard very carefully the doors of my heart in order to preserve this angelic virtue, mortifying my flesh and all inclinations to sensuality.

Wednesday

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

The Presence of God

On this day, I will rest like a sheep near its Shepherd, reflecting on His Divine Providence which guards His elect and nourishes them with the exquisite food of His Word and His Grace, of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and of the firm hope of eternal glory.

Union with Jesus Christ

I will unite myself in spirit with the Right Hand of my Saviour fastened to the Cross, reflecting on His excessive liberality which gives Paradise to the Good Thief and to me the Sacrament of the Eucharist, pledge of eternal life.

The Virtue to Practice

Under the crook of so kind a Shepherd, and under the care of so great and powerful a Procurator, I will exercise myself

in the practice of Holy Poverty, as opposed to the vice of exercising dominion, stripping myself of everything, even of the desire of possessing things, so as to live in complete renunciation and entirely abandoned to Divine Providence.

Thursday

“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.”

The Presence of God

On this day I will consider God as my Judge. He has the power of effacing and washing out all my sins: I will hold myself before Him as a debtor humble and afflicted, praying Him with all my heart to be so good as to pardon me: I will confess with sorrow all my faults, of having abused His grace, of not having satisfied for the debts which I contracted with Him, and of having left my soul in its bad habits, never thinking to perfect it by the practice of virtue nor chastising my body as I ought. But because my Judge promises me general remittance of all my debts if I remit those of the people in debt to me, I wish to forgive for love of Him all the offences which I have received from my neighbour.

Union with Jesus Christ

On this day I will hide myself in the Wound of My Saviour’s Left Hand, ad miring His extreme patience towards sinners, and the profound humility with which He suffered the blasphemies and maledictions of the Bad Thief. I will return thanks to Him for His so great patience towards me, and for His having ever filled me with benefits in spite of my faults and ingratitude.

Virtue to Practice

In considering God as my Judge, I will force myself to fight against presumption by a holy and salutary fear of His Divine Majesty. I will ever bear in mind the thought of the terrible day of the Last Judgment, reminding myself of Saint Vincent Ferrer, who had such a lively fear of it himself, and who preached it with so much zeal and fervour to the people whom he was evangelising.

Friday

“And lead us not into temptation.”

The Presence of God

On this day I will represent God to myself as my Protector and my Defender against the attacks of the enemies of my salvation. I will beg Him to grant me the grace to resist the artifices of the devil, the pleasures of the world, the stings of the flesh, and the slavery of bad habits. I will render thanks to Our Lord Jesus Christ for having placed me under the shadow of His Shame, of His Poverty, and of the Sufferings of the Cross, against the furious assaults of all the enemies of my salvation.

Union with Jesus Christ

I will hide myself in the Sacred Wounds in My Saviour’s Feet, embracing them as did the saintly sinner Magdalene. In the Wound of His Right Foot I will adore His infinite Majesty, and in that of His Left Foot His very rigorous Justice. I will lovingly embrace them both, bringing my heart near to them that they may provide me with a strong motive for both hope and fear at once, which are both most necessary, for if I were to take notice of His Mercy alone, I should, by

over-confidence, fall into presumption and be lost; and if I were to fix my eyes on His Justice alone, I should expose myself, by too great fear, to giving way to despair.

Virtue to Practice

After the example of my Jesus, I will always love my neighbour, and fight against the sin of envy, rejoicing ait his good fortune as much as at my own, for charity obliges me to love him as myself.

Saturday

“But deliver us from evil.”

The Presence of God

On this day I will consider God as my Saviour. I will hold myself before Him. as a wretched slave with hands and feet in irons. Indeed, my passions and bad habits do hold me bound under the cruel tyranny of the devil; and since I cannot of my own strength free myself from these unbearable bonds, I will humbly cry from the bottom of my heart to God my all-powerful Saviour, that He may deliver me from the weight of my sins and eternal damnation.

Union with Jesus Christ

I will represent to myself my Redeemer, taken down from the Cross, in the arms of His most holy Mother, and gazing at His mangled Body covered with wounds from Head to Foot, I will beg Him not to look at all the sins which I have committed with the help of my body, but to have the goodness to heal all my spiritual wounds and those of His Mystical Body, through the intercession of the most holy Virgin.

Virtue to Practice

I will exercise myself in the practice of the virtue of humility, ceaselessly fighting against pride and vainglory, remembering the example of the Blessed Virgin who was ever full of very great humility, albeit overflowing with every grace and adorned with every perfection.

I have given these little exercises to facilitate continuing in the Presence of God, in conformity with the subject of the meditation made in the morning. Let me add that one ought to take each day a Saint of our Order as the Protector of our recollection, as Saint Dominic for the first day, Saint Peter, Martyr, for the second, Saint Antonino for the third, Saint Thomas Aquinas for the fourth, Saint Vincent Ferrer for the fifth, Saint Raymund for the sixth, Saint Hyacinth for the seventh, or any other Saint according to each one’s devotion.

An Exhortation to Practice Mental Prayer taken from Saint Augustine

Here are some words of Saint Augustine on the practice of Mental Prayer, which are truly capable of making us arise from our spiritual torpor:

"He in whom is the love of God, is for ever thinking when he shall get to God, when leave the world, when escape the corruption of the flesh, to find true peace. For ever has he his heart uplifted and his desires raised up on high. When he is seated, when he walks, when he rests, or when he is engaged on something, his heart does not withdraw from God. He exhorts all to love God, to all he recommends the love of God, and proves with his heart, by word and by work, how sweet is the love of God, and how bad and bitter the love of the world. He despises the world's glory, and refutes the desire of it, and he shows how foolish it is to put one's trust in the things that pass. He is astounded at the blindness of men who love these things, astounded also that everyone does not abandon these vain and transitory things. What he knows to be so sweet, he thinks should be sweet to all, what so pleases him, please all, what is manifest to him, be clear to all. Often does he contemplate his God, and in his contemplation is sweetly strengthened, and is so much the happier as it is the more frequent. For what is sweet to love and praise, is a pleasure to consider.

"Truly this is real rest for the heart, when its whole desire is fixed upon the love of God, and has taste for nothing else, but is delighted in what it holds with such happy sweetness, and in its delight is radiantly joyful. And if some vain thought or some affair interrupts this happiness, with the utmost speed it hastens to get back to it, deeming it exile to

rest elsewhere. Therefore is it not to be considered as a slight sin for one who is speaking with God in Prayer suddenly to withdraw out of His sight as though He were not there seeing and hearing. But this happens when he follows wicked or inopportune thoughts, or when he prefers to God some most wretched creature to the thought of which he is easily drawn, thinking of this creature and pondering over the thought of it more often than of God, of Whom he ought to be assiduously mindful, adoring Him as his Creator, awaiting Him as his Saviour, and fearing Him as his Judge."

The Importance for Religious Souls of the Interior Life, of Mental Prayer, and of the Practice of the Presence of God

Among all the spiritual exercises which most efficaciously keep religious souls in continual interior recollection, we must put in the first place Mental Prayer, with its holy considerations and devout affections which lead us to the practice, and supply us with the means, of animating all our actions with a real spirit of devotion. Vocal prayers and exterior actions can help to some small extent, but they do not suffice. Interior devotion, a real love of our neighbour, an ardent love of God, ought to be the basis of our perfection. Otherwise we should merit the reproaches which Our Lord addressed to the Jews who gave everything to the exterior: "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you are like to whited sepulchres which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness. So you also outwardly, indeed, appear to men just, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." - *Matthew 22:27,28*

One of the greatest and most dangerous imperfections, then, of the religious life is to be careful of the exterior only, without paying attention to the interior; to perform the exercises and observances of Religion only superficially and hastily, from habit and with- out the spirit of devotion, not forcing oneself to animate ordinary actions with interior sentiments of fervour and piety as is necessary to make them meritorious and satisfactory in the eyes of God. Tepidity, dissipation, frequent transgressions of regular observances, thousands and thousands of dangers into

which many throw themselves, too often to their total loss and ruin, are the consequences of this very sad state.

Let religious recall the terrible threat which Jesus Christ made Saint John the Evangelist write to the bishops of Ephesus and Laodicea: "Unto the Angel of the Church of Ephesus write:...I have somewhat against thee because thou has left thy first charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen; and do penance and do the first works. Or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance." "And to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea write:...I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm ... I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." - *Apocalypse 3:14-16* It is only too true that the actions of religious souls are sometimes tepid waters which cause God to vomit, because they abandon the interior - that is to say. Mental Prayer, rigorous observance of silence, the retreat of their cell, the practice of recollection, the reading of spiritual books, interior intercourse with God, the longing desires of the heart for heaven, peace, fraternal charity, modesty, simplicity and purity, which are interior exercises and without which all their exterior actions cannot stop God from vomiting them out of His mouth. O that great numbers may not have already merited this chastisement, so please His Infinite Majesty!

Let all religious of Saint Dominic, brethren or sisters, professed or novices, read through the Annals of the Order in which they make their profession, and they will see that it has been founded on the practice of Mental Prayer. It is quite certain that this heavenly edifice would never have been established nor have made any progress if it had been built only on the sand of exterior ceremonies and not on the rock and solid earth of continual meditation. The Queen of Angels, who gave the habit to our first Fathers, made them

understand that under their white robe they ought to bear a pure and spotless heart - a grace which they could never have obtained if they had not applied themselves wholly and entirely to prayer. Indeed, the heart is never fully purified except in the flames of holy meditations.

Saint Dominic understood perfectly this truth which he learned from the sacred lips of Mary, his dearly beloved Mother. We read in his life that he employed not only an hour or two in Mental Prayer, but entire nights, with an interior recollection in the Presence of God which lasted during all the following day. He persevered thus in the practice of Mental Prayer until the last night of his holy life, to teach us by his example that he founded his Order on the immovable rock of Mental Prayer, in order that by this means we may be able to overcome all obstacles and resist the temptations of the devil, the flesh, and the world, without ever diminishing in anything the rigour and perfection of regular observance. Again, in the first years after the establishment of the Order, not only were the cells of our Fathers the ordinary abode of heavenly light, of silence, of retreat, of meditation and contemplation, but our churches also bore witness to the ardent aspirations and sweet lamentations and ecstatic prayers of these angels incarnate. In those hearts so united to God, so filled with the light and heavenly sweetness of Prayer, the pure spirit of observance, of heavenly wisdom, of ardent charity, of zeal for the salvation of souls, developed to such an extent, that within a few years the Order of Saint Dominic spread throughout the world with wonderful and incredible fruit.

Religious, then, who are unwilling to apply themselves to the practice of Prayer, will not bear fruit either in themselves or in others. In fact, if we content ourselves merely with the externals of observance and do not thoroughly give ourselves to the interior spirit of devotion, we rase to the

ground, so far as it is in us, the whole edifice of this great fortress set up by God through Saint Dominic for the defence of Holy Church.

This is why, having a great desire to assist religious who fear the divine threats and who in holy religious life wish to live in the fervour of spirit which animated our first Fathers, we decided to give this short advice concerning the Presence of God, along with the meditations which are contained in the next chapter. If it be true, as cannot be doubted, that the Blessed are impeccable because they are always living in the Presence of God, those among ourselves who devote the whole day to recollection before God will also preserve themselves from sin; and actually working to advance in the ways of perfection, as all religious are bound in conscience to do in virtue of their profession, they will find that at the end of the day their soul is enjoying such perfect tranquillity and consolation as surpasses all understanding.

Let all our religious, then, embrace the practice of Mental Prayer with great purity of intention, not seeking any other thing than to get to know well the Will of God, to conform themselves entirely to His good pleasure, and to content themselves with it alone, since for this end we were created, to know, love, serve, and obey Him; and let them with generous and invincible courage, and with holy perseverance, overcome all the obstacles which ordinarily present themselves to prevent us from attaining this end. Those who remain faithful to the practice of Prayer are bound to feel sure that they are walking infallibly along the path to heaven. It is, in fact, impossible that they should be damned if they devote themselves to praying well, to meditating well, and to contemplating well, since Prayer is nothing else than the union of our understanding and will with God Who is the life of our souls. Is it possible to meet with death in the Source of Life? Whoever unites himself

with God, Who is the Source of Life, will never taste eternal death. More than this, we shall be certain that we are to be vessels of honour in this world, and instruments chosen by God to spread throughout His Church lively faith in Jesus Christ, and procure thereby the salvation and sanctification of souls.

To conclude, we will cite an important passage from Saint Augustine. The vigorous and burning words of the holy Doctor, if we meditate upon them attentively, will raise our thoughts towards heaven and effectually excite us to the practice of Mental Prayer. "My Lord," he says, ". . . therefore do I arise to the most delightful and happy state of peace and joy and light. Take my heart in Thy Hand, for without Thee to yet higher things it cannot rise. Hold and rule my spirit, uplift it according to Thy Will, that under Thy guidance it may ascend to that land of plenty where Israel finds food for ever in the pastures of truth, that there, if only by swift thought, it may attain to Thee the highest Wisdom which dwelleth above all things, knowing and governing all things. But there are many things which obstruct the way in my soul's flight up to Thee; at Thy command, O Lord, let all things fall before me; let my soul itself be quiet within me; let it pass by all created things; let it pass to Thee, attain to Thee, and let it set its eyes . . . on Thee, the sole Creator of all things; set its heart on Thee, the highest and true Good, Joy everlasting.

"Finally, there are many subjects for meditation, on which the soul devoted to Thee may wonderfully feed; but in none of them does my soul rest and delight so much as when it thinks or and contemplates Thee Alone. How great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, with which Thou dost wonderfully inspire the hearts of those that love Thee! How wonderfully sweet is Thy love which those enjoy who love, seek, and desire to think of nothing else but Thee! Happy

are they for whom Thou art the only Hope, and whose whole work is Prayer." - *Meditationes, chapter 37*

About This EBook

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